

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, ACTING RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION, FEDERAL SERVICES, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
Hearing on “Lessons Learned: How the New Administration Can Achieve an Accurate
and Cost-Effective 2010 Census”

March 5, 2009

Senator Carper, I want to thank you for holding this hearing today. I appreciate your continued oversight of the Census Bureau’s preparations for the 2010 census, and I look forward to working with you to ensure a fair and accurate counting of all the people residing here in the United States.

A fair and accurate counting is critical. House apportionment, legislative districting, and federal funding to the states all depend on accurate census results. No state should be unfairly denied representation or funding for essential services because the Census Bureau cannot resolve problems that have plagued it for decades. One of those problems is undercounting.

My home state of Arizona suffered severely from undercounting in the 1990 Census. As a result, Arizona was denied an additional congressional seat and lost millions of dollars in federal revenue for schools, roads, housing and other public services. Resolving the issue continues to spur debate and the need to make constant improvements to traditional enumeration methods remains a top priority.

For the outcome to be accurate, the process must be fair. Fairness requires that the counting be done in a manner that does not discriminate and does not dissuade participation. That means the Bureau must ensure that its outreach efforts in historically undercounted communities, such as we have in Arizona, are comprehensive and focused. As in 2000, establishing effective partnerships with a wide array of organizations in government, business, and the community, will be vital to elicit participation from underserved groups. I look forward to hearing our witnesses’ opinions on best practices from prior decennials and suggestions for innovative new solutions for the future.

In light of these goals of fairness and accuracy, I was very concerned to learn last year that the Census Bureau invested millions of dollars in handheld computers that cannot deliver the capability once promised. I know that our committee examined the issue, but I still feel compelled to voice my outrage over the loss of so much taxpayer money because of cost overruns and mismanagement. We cannot afford to waste money on programs and technologies that do not work. Nor can we afford the time it takes to make adjustments to program designs so late in the planning process. I am concerned that this will not allow enough time for adequate testing of all critical systems and procedures before additional census activities begin. I am interested to hear from our Government Accountability Office witnesses about the current status of these setbacks and how much delay this mismanagement has caused.

Time is of the essence as address canvassing is already underway and Census Day is just over one year away. Every stage of the census is critical and constant operational set-backs of this order cannot help but test this nation's trust that a fair and accurate census is exactly what we'll get.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.